WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY - Founded December 17, 1857 APRIL 1994

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

Party photos courtesy of Karen O'Neal

Lots of people got up and danced to the Glen Miller sound of the Saline Big Band (above) at *"Stage Door Canteen, 50 Years Later"* at the Cobblestone Farm Barn March 25. Below left jitterbugs did their thing including Rosie the Riveter (Susan Wineberg, left) and husband, Lars Bjorn. Remember saddle shoes and bobby sox (lower right)?

GIs of 50 years ago answered roll call (below), some in uniform, and told where they had served. Some uniforms were borrowed, some still fit!

SPEAKER TO BRING BACK 'LOST ANN ARBOR' AT LEAST ON FILM . . .

Wystan Stevens, unofficial Ann Arbor historian and photographer about town, will present a slide show about *"Lost Ann Arbor"* at the WCHS meeting at 2 p.m. Sunday, April 17, at the Ann Arbor Public Library.

Stevens will talk about Ann Arbor buildings that have been demolished and draw on his extensive photographic collection to illustrate.

The meeting will be in the Multi-Purpose Room in the lower level. Parking in library lot and at Fourth and William Street structure.

ANNUAL MEETING MAY 18

The WCHS annual meeting and election of officers will be held Wednesday, May 18, at Cobblestone Farm Barn, beginning with a potluck supper.

HERE'S THE ANSWER

The answer to the *"Can you date this?"* item on page seven of the March Impressions is 1916.

EXHIBIT TO FEATURE RECENT DONATIONS

WCHS has been arranging historical exhibits in the Washtenaw County Administration Building lobby (former post office). Nancy McKinney, chair, plans an exhibit featuring recent donations beginning in mid-April.

COBBLESTONE FARM HOUSE CELEBRATES 150 YEARS

The 150th anniversary of Cobblestone Farm house will be celebrated from 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Sunday, May 15 at the farm, 2781 Packard Road., with tours, Scottish music, smokehouse, blacksmithing and traditional cooking demonstrations. Information: 994-2928.

HURON RIVER POWERED LOTS OF MILLS

There are reputed to have been more than 50 mills along the Huron River, not all at the same time but during the course of the water power period in the 19th century, Professor Marshall McLennan told the March WCHS audience at Ypsilanti's Ladies Literary Club house.

Professor McLennan, director of the historic preservation program at Eastern Michigan University, said, "I have by no means located all of them. Even among the ones I'm aware of, I'm only going to speak about a selected group."

"This research came about back in 1978. Two of us professors in the geography department got a grant from the Bureau of History in Lansing to look for old mill sites along the river.

"The original idea was to study the Huron River as a source of energy in the mill period, steam period and hydro-electric period.

"We felt that the need for water power went a long way in explaining development of settlement patterns in Washtenaw County.

"But the University sent my colleague, who was to share in this, to North Yemen instead.

"Since I lost my colleague, I never did get to the hydro-electric period and even the steam period got short shrift.

The theory nevertheless was born out that, of any of the settlements that did ultimately mature into major towns and villages, that water power was extremely important in terms of where they were located.

"The only important exception is Chelsea which was a railroad town. The coming of the railroad does more to explain the location and historical development of Chelsea than does water power.

"With Ypsilanti, Ann Arbor, Dexter and Delhi Mills it was true. Even with Manchester, which I didn't study because my study was limited to the Huron River, I think it was true. I'm sure the Raisin River had similar parallels to the Huron."

He then showed slides, beginning with a map of Washtenaw County to point out the course of the Huron River, from the north cutting in a generally southeast direction across the center of the county past Dexter, Ann Arbor, the county seat, established in 1824, and Ypsilanti.

"Ypsilanti likes to say it was established in 1823 and maybe, technically, we could say this was true, but it was really Woodruff's Grove, a little further down river, that was established in 1823. The Grove site is under Ford Lake today, Ypsilanti historian Foster Fletcher told me a few years back. But, in any event, Ypsilanti was truly established in 1824.

Mill photos courtesy of Marshall McLennan

Huron Flouring Mills, Ypsilanti, on Water Street just south of Michigan Avenue in 19th century.

"We're going to work up the river from Ypsilanti. Here we have a redrawing of an old plat map of Ypsilanti I think done in 1827.

"Ypsilanti is an example of a phenomenon that occurred a number of different times. That is that a community that straddles a river is given two centers.

"Marshall, Michigan comes to mind. Although it doesn't straddle a river, there are competing elements at the two ends of town that tried to establish their focus as the main one.

"At the beginning, Ypsilanti had three proprietors—the William Harwood section on the east side of the river and John Stewart and Mr. Woodward from Detroit, both on the west side of the river.

"The line that cuts diagonally across the map dates from an old French claim. There were four French long lots that were laid out in association with an old trading post that was built in 1811 where the Potawatomi Trail crossed the Huron River in what was to become Ypsilanti.

"The Frenchmen carried on trade with the Indians for a few years before the fort burned down. The four long lot claims remained there and today Forest Avenue still runs along the boundary of one of those claims. It doesn't fit in with the grid layout of the rest of the city.

"Coming back to the subject at hand, one of the very first mills ever established in Ypsilanti was Harwood's flour mill just south of Michigan Avenue. That site passed through many ownerships but remained a mill site through much of the 19th century.

"An 1850s map of the northeast quadrant of Ypsilanti in Bentley Library shows a segment of the Huron River as it passes through the heart of the Ypsilanti milling area.

"Here's Harwood's mill just south of Michigan Avenue. Up at Cross Street and Depot Town, early on, a millrace was constructed separating off a segment of land now known as Frog Island.

"And Mark Norris, one of the early pioneers of the town, established a flour mill right by the Congress Street bridge on the Depot Town (east) side but along that race there had been a series of water-powered industries, among them planing mills and even an iron forge. Eagle Mill stood near the Forest Avenue bridge.

On the 1850s map, a mill bearing the sign "Huron Mills" was on the Harwood site. "Today Water Street is the first street that you encounter as you drive east across the Michigan Avenue bridge. Obviously it was so named because it gave access to water-based industrial development."

He showed a photo of Huron Mills when it was owned by William Duebel. In another photo, probably taken in the 1870s or '80s, looking south from the Michigan Avenue bridge, one could see some of the homes along Huron Street on the south side of Michigan Avenue. (Michigan Avenue was once known as Congress Street.)

"One could see a little walkway built from the mill out over the river and turbulence in the water—water was impounded by not exactly a dam but a rock impoundment that delayed the flow of the river sufficiently that water could be diverted by a race into the mill water wheels.

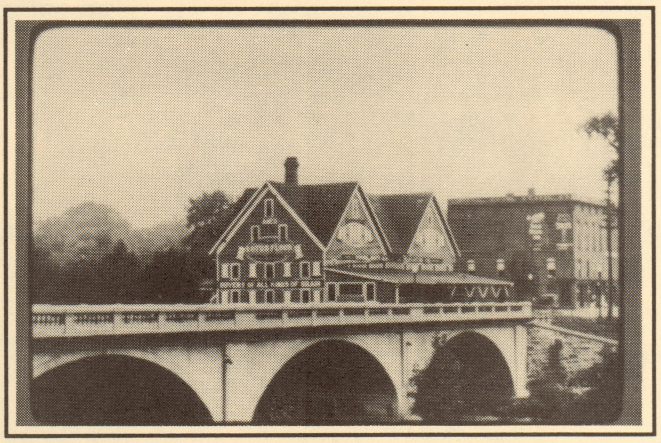
"If you stand on that bridge today and look south you can still see some of the turbulence.

"At Cross Street we find the mill that

Mark Norris established on the east side of the river. In another view of it you can see the Depot Town hotel building in the background and the bridge that was replaced in the last few years. The hotel was once the largest along the Michigan Central Railroad line between Detroit and Chicago.

"Whether these mills were overshot or undershot, that type of thing I don't know. I have never run into any descriptions of mills explaining the mechanics of their operation.

In a photo looking north from the Cross Street bridge you could see the Follmor and Scovill Planing Mill on Frog Island. On the west side of the river stood Todd and Hayes Underwear Factory. That water power site developed originally in the 1830s. I believe the first mill on that site was a flour mill.



Ypsilanti Grain and Elevator Company, Cross Street in Depot Town (top) and (below) Ypsilanti Underwear Factory in background, planing mill on Frog Island (right).

"At one time the underwear factory had a larger than life picture of a lady in her underwear on the side of the building visible to railroad passengers who were often fascinated by it.

"The original Todd and Hayes plant was in Ann Arbor. They bought out the Ypsilanti factory which had developed independently earlier.

"Frog Island today is used for recreation. It was the athletic field for Ypsilanti High School before the school relocated at Packard and Hewitt. Before that this island had a long history of industrial use. Its present bucolic look belies that history.

"If one walks out on the Cross Street bridge today, you can look down and see a culvert that actually drains what was the old mill race that separated Frog Island from the mainland. The race has long since been filled in but water does seep through there.

"Moving up the river and around the bend westward until one is about parallel with the EMU campus, one can see the Peninsular Paper Company in an old photo.

"Early milling on the Huron River was primarily flour, sawing or woolen milling or carding, but from the 1850s onward, another whole era emerged in the use of water power and that was for the manufacture of paper.

"Of all the mills we are looking at today, only the Peninsular Paper Company survives and continues to operate though it doesn't use water power anymore. Only a few of the buildings pictured survive. The dominant building one sees there today is a 20th century building."

Using a panoramic overview of Ypsilanti in the 1890s, he reviewed the mills he had shown. The mills were illustrated putting up smoke. "Today we think of pollution, once it was thought of as progress."

The 1890s view showed a twin gable mill building on the east side of the Cross Street bridge on the mill site originally established by Mark Norris. It also showed an additional mill race down the middle of Frog Island. The underwear factory was visible and, in the far corner, the Peninsular Paper Mill.

"Something I don't know the story on at all, there was a Race Street (now part of Catherine by Water Works Park) that took its name from an old mill race built across a loop of land by the river. I've never seen a picture of a mill or any sort of industry using that race."

"Continuing up the river from Peninsular Paper Mill at LeForge Road, the next cross road is Superior Road. That's where Cornwell Paper Mill was (shown in an 1875 photo).

"If one goes across that bridge today, the first street you come to on the west side is First Street. I don't know what happened to Second Street. I don't know whether it ever got built but the paper mill did get built. In fact, Cornwell owned several mills on the river in the second half of the 19th century.

"I'm sorry I'm going to pass up Parker Mill. I couldn't find my slides of it. The foundation of the mill actually dates back to 1825 when a sawmill was built there by a fellow by the name of Fleming who gave his name to the creek it was on, near where it empties into the Huron River. Geddes Mill was on the other side of the river.

On an 1850s map of Ann Arbor, he pointed out that where Broadway crosses the river there was an Indian trail crossing and potential for water power. He also pointed out where Allen Creek angles its way to the river.

"Even in 1824 John Allen's father and brother started to build a sawmill where Allen Creek enters the Huron. It probably only lasted for about a year before a superior sawmill was built a little to the east.

"Allen Creek didn't turn out to have the water power that founders of the town visualized. The creek area, nevertheless, did develop as one of the early Ann Arbor industrial areas.

"While Allen Creek may have provided difficulties in providing sufficient power for turning water wheels, it nevertheless provided an adequate supply for steam based industries.

"There was a fellow by the name of Chapin that ran a forge in the Allen Creek area for many years until he sold out and reinvested his money in the paper milling industry.

"A dam (now known as Argo) was built across the river and then a millrace that comes down across Broadway." He pointed out industrial buildings shown on the map, most making use of water power. In the 1850s there were a flour mill, sawmill and woolen mill and, eventually, a paper mill."

Allen Creek later became the right-of-way of the Ann Arbor Railroad. Allen

Creek crosses east-west streets about two blocks west of Main Street. The 1850s map showed the creek dammed with a race that channeled some of the water.

"The Ann Arbor Central Mill sat where Allen Creek did flow into the river before it was channelized into an underground culvert. It was one of the two most important mills in Ann Arbor."

An 1870s view showed the Argo Dam from upstream and the start of the Argo millrace. In an 1890s view an Ann Arbor Railroad train trestle had been added near Argo dam.

The Argo millrace curves around to the flour mill that was at Broadway and Pontiac Street where the Detroit Edison relay station (no longer in use) stands. Professor McLennan called it "the most important mill in Ann Arbor history."

"The original mill was built by the fellow who established that plat on the north side of the river, Anson Brown. He had big plans for the development of the north side and he thought it would eventually eclipse Allen and Rumsey's settlement on the south side.

"Unfortunately, within a very few years of getting everything underway, Anson Brown was taken by cholera in the early 1830s and died. Much of the impetus or, you might say, the vision of development of this area evaporated with his death.

"Nevertheless, the mill race was there, the flour mill that Anson Brown had built was there, and while the three or four or five industries that took root there continued to function throughout most of the 19th century, the area didn't really expand from that point onward.

"For much of the 19th century the flour mill was under ownership of a fellow named Sinclair and it was the largest or most productive in Ann Arbor throughout most of the 19th century. It was later known as Argo Mill.

"Until the 1860s, Ypsilanti was much more significant as a flour milling center than Ann Arbor. By the 1860s they were about at parity.

"In the late 19th century the Ann Arbor Agricultural Works utilized water power from the Argo mill race. For many years they were the largest employer in Ann Arbor. Today the University of Michigan fills that function.

"A publication called *Headlight* was issued for each town across Michigan on the Michigan Central Railroad. In the Ann Arbor issue there's a sort of idealized view of the agricultural works, Broadway Bridge and Argo race flowing back into the river with a fanciful sailboat.

"I don't know to what extent the river depths have changed today but do keep in mind this is where the Indians used to ford the river. You can still ford it today after spring melt has gone by.

Argo Mills (Ann Arbor Milling Company) on Broadway, 1890s (top) and north side of Main Street, Dexter, 1868, with Dexter Mills in background.

"Early in the 20th century Detroit Edison began buying up many of the power sites along the river, changing from the era of water and steam power to hydro-electric power.

"Some of the hydro-electric power was developed, much of it never was. Detroit Edison also did buy up a lot of land between the electric stations. The present Detroit Edison buildings across Broadway from the relay station are on the site of the agricultural works.

"Today a path goes across the mouth of the old mill and it is part of the parks system.

"One almost doesn't notice (in one old picture) there are little sheds sitting along the river edge back of the agricultural works. I learned these were slaughtering houses for butchers in Ann Arbor. I guess what wasn't intended to be sold just got tossed in the river.

"Cornwell, who had several paper manufacturing facilities along the river, had one just up river from Ann Arbor that made paper pulp." A photo showed that facility and the dam that he built to impound water.

"Unfortunately, since he wasn't very cooperative with other industries, his dam at times interfered with the agricultural works getting an adequate water supply.

"They complained to no avail and one night Cornwell's dam blew up." He showed a picture of the broken dam.

"If one turns off North Main Street to Huron River Drive, a very short way up you come to a bend in the road and river. There's a turn off area. If you walk down to the riverbank you can see the two ends of the dam foundation. It was just a dirt dam, probably reinforced with a log structure. Today the dirt just extends into the river a bit.

"A little up river from Ann Arbor at Maple Road, we have what was platted as Newport. Once developed, it came to be known as Foster Station.

"This Foster first came out to Michigan and worked for Samuel Dexter at his flour mill in Dexter in 1825. He eventually decided to strike out on his own. He first attempted a mill at Scio about where Zeeb Road crosses the river. Two years later he platted Newport.

"I guess he wanted to make his fortune as much in real estate as in industrial activity. On the south side of the river we do find some Greek Revival homes in this area that probably date to establishment of this settlement. But on the other side of the river is a pretty steep hill. That part of the plat never really took.

"Foster Station did develop some degree of success as an industrial center. There was another of Cornwell's paper mills. A photo showed several industrial buildings and a smokestack on the north side of the river.

"Now only some ruins are visible when river levels go down." He found a bit of retaining wall among the grass and brush.

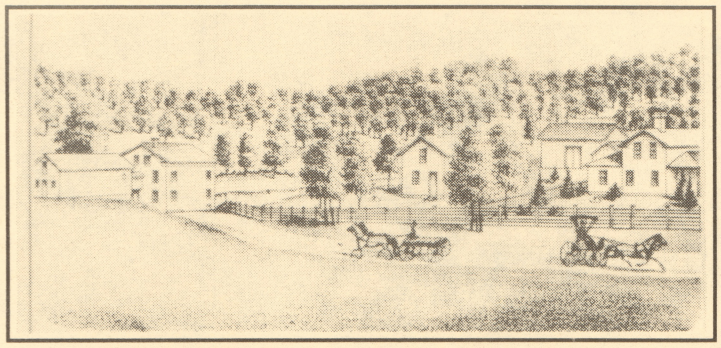
"Not all the mills on the river gave rise to settlement. Henry Osborn built a flouring mill on his farm up river from Scio. I have not explored this site to see if there are any remnants there or not.

"Further up the river we come to Delhi. The fellow who established the town and developed the milling site was a teetotaler. He owned all the real estate and he decided this was going to be a dry town.

"A birdseye view in the 1874 county atlas shows the town was thriving at that time. A number of the houses are still there. In the background we can see the milling activity.

"There was a flour mill on each side of the river and a sawmill. The bridge was not the same as the old iron bridge there now.

"A lot of the rock foundations of these mills were just pushed down into the river. Delhi rapids that we see there today are basically a man-made creation.



Drawing of Osborn mill and residence in Scio township from 1874 county atlas.

"On the north side of the river, before you cross the bridge, there's a little path that goes into the bushes and sort of parallels the river. As you walk along it you come upon foundation ruins of the second flour mill.

"If you follow that path far enough you can still see the weir or remnants of the impoundment that diverted water to a millrace on that side of the river."

An 1868 photograph of Dexter showed old Federal style buildings along Main Street and a mill in the background. "A fire burned the store buildings down. I think they were all ultimately replaced. The recent fire on Main Street was on the other side.

"Here is the Dexter flour mill built in 1825 by Samuel Dexter who had a sawmill on the other side of the creek.. He came from Massachusetts. He came from a well-to-do family and he had ambitions. Ultimately he took his ambitions north to the Saginaw area and Byron.

One of the oldest photos McLennan has found relating to Washtenaw County in Bentley Library is one of Dexter dated "1845?" "It was just about that time that photography was emerging."

It showed the dam Samuel Dexter had to build across Mill Creek to create power for the mill. The historic home, today housing the American Legion, is in the background.

"Around the bend from the downtown area, out where the cider mill is, we have Mast Road and the iron truss bridge. I guess that was still there when I came to Michigan in 1970.

"It has been replaced now, and, because of the construction of the newer bridge, the site of the Mast Road mill has been completely destroyed.

"I'm not sure whether there were some other mills a little upstream on the far side of the river or not but we do have what looks like a millrace in the photo."

Moving up river he did not comment on Hudson Mills on Territorial Road near Dexter-Pinckney Road but he did show the 1874 drawing of the Thomas Birkett mill and residence in Dexter township almost up to the county line. The Birkett house burned and another has been built on the same site.

"It was a fascinating era on the river. At the turn of the century we find these mills, one by one, going out of business. Some of them were just not able to compete against larger industries that were coming into being but , in many instances, it was the Detroit electric company buying out the sites with the idea of developing hydro-electricity.

"Let me just finish with one comment on that and what that has to do with the Henry Ford factory and dam that creates Ford Lake in Ypsilanti.

"As many of you know, Henry Ford, though father of the production line in this country, was responsible for a sort of village industry movement, too.

"Like Thomas Jefferson, he always believed that cities are corrupt, that it's only by living in the countryside that you maintain a healthy outlook on life.

"When he decided to build the factory in Ypsilanti, he had the dam constructed not only to provide hydro-electric power but it was his intention that the lake it created would be drained during the growing season and his factory workers would go out and raise crops there.

"As it turned out, the lake wouldn't refill quickly enough to also support the manufacturing activities. Ultimately, the bottom line prevailed over the saving of the ethics of the workers."

OOPS!

A few copies of March's *Impressions* carried incorrect mailing labels. Your membership chair accidentally sorted the names of those who were members in 1992 and 1993 without proper matching addresses. With the assistance of Louisa Pieper, most of the damage was corrected, however a few goofs slipped through. The problem has been corrected for this issue.

Additionally, several persons that mailed their membership checks in envelopes supplied with their membership letter had the envelope returned marked *"No Receptacle"* for which we apologize. Even though the ZIP code was correct, we should have added P.O. Box 3336 on the same line as 500 N Main Street. That problem, too, will be corrected in future mailings.

GIFTS RUN GAMUT FROM CIVIL WAR TO 1990S

Recent gifts to WCHS range from an 1862 framed scrap of a Civil War flag to a "RESERVED" table sign from Drake's Sandwich Shop which closed this winter.

Peggy Haines, Washtenaw County Clerk, donated approximately 30 yards of red, white and blue bunting used at the cornerstone laying for the present County Building April 12, 1954. (WCHS already put it to use at the USO party March 25.)

Mrs. Haines also gave some programs from the cornerstone ceremonies and a red leather bound book listing Washtenaw County justices of the peace 1939-1968 and an old wooden flag box to go with a Washtenaw County flag and plaque previously given.

(The large white flag with blue fringe was given the county by J.L. Hudson Company during their 60th jubilee year in 1941.)

Susan Wineberg, WCHS vice-president, gave the Civil War flag scrap, five 1890 glass negatives of the Blakeslee family, some printed ephemera from Mrs. Homer Hayward about the Washtenaw Home Extension groups 1937-50 and numerous items from Drake's given by Eleanor Tibbals, daughter of owner Truman Tibbals. Items , dating 1920-90, included a salt shaker, menus and recipes.

Bentley Library donated 12 volumes of legal books signed by Ann Arbor founder John Allen.

Art French of the WCHS board gave a small prescription box from Eberbach Pharmacy.

SORORITY HOUSE TOUR SET SUNDAY, APRIL 10

Seventeen U-M sorority houses will be open to tour 1-4 p.m. Sunday, April 10 to benefit the Ann Arbor Community Center. Tickets, $3 each, and maps available noon-2 p.m. April 10, in Michigan Union basement. Information: Pan-Hellenic office at Union, 663-4505.

HOW TO JOIN

Send name, address and phone number with check or money order payable to Washtenaw County Historical Society to: WCHS Membership, c/o Patty Creal, Treasurer, 2655 Esch Drive, Ann Arbor, MI 48104.

Annual dues are: individual, $15; couple/family, $25; student or senior (60+), $10; senior couple (one 60+), $19; business/association, $50; patron, $100. Information: 662-9092.

"USO hostesses" Joanne Rebeck and Patty Creal wore red and white candy stripe aprons. Other partygoers are Rosie the Riveter (Susan Wineberg, second from left), Ray Tanter in a zoot suit and Maya Saverino (far right).

STAGE DOOR CANTEEN 50 YEARS LATER A 'FAB' PARTY

What a nostalgia trip it was! The GIs were there in World War II uniforms. The *"USO hostesses"* were all about. Even Rosie the Riveter (Susan Wineberg) was there in overalls with hair tied up in a red kerchief.

The Saline Big Band played all those old familiar Glen Miller pieces. Judy Dow Alexander belted out Kate Smith favorites from *"When the Moon Comes Over the Mountain"* to *"The White Cliffs of Dover"* to *"God Bless America"* in which all sang along.

And you should have seen them jitterbug. Susan Bauer and Douglas Beaumont gave a spectacular Olympic-class demonstration of jitterbugging but the partiers did some mean jitterbugging too.

Some partiers resurrected 1940s era clothing and our too-young-to-remember president let her hair down for a 1940s look. Some danced in their all-around pleated skirts from high school with sweaters, saddle shoes or loafers and bobby sox.

(All around pleated skirts were *"too full"* for manufacturer's to meet war time regulations. Boughten skirts had skimpy pleats to save cloth but a girl could make her own with only one and a half yards of wool and no waste.)

Even the Spam sandwiches were good!

The financial report and thank you list of helpers will be given next time. It was not available at press time.

Gail Bauer, chairman, (top, left to right), Joanne Rebeck, WCHS President Pat Austin, and Kay Black at decorating session the night before party. Below, Deborah Hildebrandt, Anne Benninghoff, in her late husband's uniform, and Liz Elling enjoy the party.

Editor: Alice Ziegler, 663-8826
Address: 537 Riverview Dr., Ann Arbor, MI 48104
Mailing: Louisa Pieper,996-3008
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Wystan Stevens
'LOST ANN ARBOR'

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April 17, 1994

Ann Arbor Public Library
343 South Fifth Avenue
Ann Arbor, Michigan

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